STATE AND LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

The public health infrastructure is the foundation that supports the planning, delivery and evaluation of public health activities. The strength of this foundation depends on sustained, consistent investment and cooperation between all levels of government. However, the public health infrastructure has been underfunded and neglected for many years. As a result, public health may be completely unprepared to respond to public health threats and emergencies. The public health infrastructure is comprised of seven priority capacities:

- A well-trained public health workforce;
- Effective program and policy evaluation;
- Sufficient epidemiology and surveillance capability to detect outbreaks and monitor incidence of diseases;
- Appropriate response capacity for public health emergencies;
- Effective laboratories;
- Secure information systems; and
- Advanced communication systems.

Despite agreement on the seven priority capacities, little is known about the strengths and weaknesses of the public health infrastructure in state and local jurisdictions. Two major problems are evident: (1) lack of formal assessment of priority capacities in national, state and local public health systems; and (2) lack of a National Data System to describe the infrastructure at the state and local level.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC and partner organizations–through the National Public Health Performance Standards Program, the Bioterrorism Core Capacities Project, and the Capacity Inventory–have developed assessment instruments and methodologies to measure the public health system in state and local jurisdictions. Core competencies for the public health workforce have been established, and the Health Alert Network has strengthened the communication capacity between federal, state and local public health agencies.

Example of program in action: CDC has created a framework to develop public health improvement plans and address the assessment and capacity-building requirement of the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Ongoing support for broad public health infrastructure will allow communities to identify gaps through routine, formal assessments. These assessments will provide the information needed to identify persistent and emerging gaps and to plan for capacity building to ensure a competent, fully functional, nationwide public health system. By building on the progress made by bioterrorism preparedness activities, every state and local health system can be fully prepared and every community fully protected from public health threats.

For information about this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.   *February 2002*